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AUTHOR Durkin, Dolores
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ABSTRACT

A vast amount of reading comprehension research was reported in the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s. The study reported in this paper used the basal reading programs considered by California for adoption in 1988 as a vehicle for examining how the comprehension research had affected basal materials. Five series that were completely new and that had been issued by influential publishers were chosen for study, and two topics were selected for attention: main idea and story structure. Results revealed that the five series did not turn out to be as different from their predecessors as they appeared to be at first. Four of the five series examined use expository and narrative text indiscriminately when they teach and review main ideas. As a result, the conception of "main idea" that the four series foster is neither clear nor consistent. The series are similar to older programs except that they cover many more topics. Results also showed that all five series teach the components of stories early; and much of what they teach is covered quickly. Additionally, the four series that use narrative text for main idea instruction never relate what is done with stories in the manual sections to what is taught in other sections labeled "story structure." Finally, examination also revealed that expository texts are often referred to as "stories," even though all five series teach and frequently review the nature of "story." Findings suggest that manual segments dealing with main idea and story structure need to be improved. (Three tables and 3 figures of data are included; 36 references are attached.) (KEH)

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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF READING

Technical Report No. 521

COMPREHENSION INSTRUCTION IN CURRENT BASAL READER SERIES

Dolores Durkin
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

December 1990

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
51 Gerty Drive
Champaign, Illinois 61820

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Abstract

A casual skimming of the manuals accompanying new basal reader series is enough to reveal unprecedented attention to comprehension. The generous coverage meant that when a decision was made to learn about comprehension instruction in current manuals, limitations had to be placed on what would be scrutinized. Two topics were selected for study, main ideas and story structure. It was thought that the main idea instruction would shed light on how current basal programs deal with expository text. It was further assumed that recommendations for teaching about story components would reveal what the programs do with the structure of stories. To achieve the two objectives, Kindergarten through Grade 6 manuals in five basal series were read page by page.

Results showed that the assumption for main idea instruction was correct for only one series, as the other four series use expository and narrative text indiscriminately when they teach and review main ideas. As a result, the conception of "main idea" that the four series foster is neither clear nor consistent.

Results also showed that all five series teach the components of stories early; and much of what they teach is covered quickly. Review occurs often through Grade 6. In addition, the four series that use narrative text for main idea instruction never relate what is done with stories in these manual sections to what is taught in other sections labeled "Story Structure."

Finally, even though all five series teach and frequently review the nature of "story," expository texts are often referred to as "stories."

COMPREHENSION INSTRUCTION IN CURRENT BASAL READER SERIES

In April 1976, the National Institute of Education circulated a Request for Proposals (RFP) that described the need for an interdisciplinary group of researchers to concentrate on reading comprehension. Three assumptions of the RFP were:

1. Reading comprehension can be taught.

2. Reading comprehension is being taught.

3. Reading comprehension instruction is not as effective as it should be.

This RFP accounted for the establishment of the Center for the Study of Reading (CSR) at the University of Illinois in the fall of 1976. The primary responsibility of the CSR was to improve comprehension instruction in classrooms.

In 1977, with the support of the CSR, I undertook a classroom observation study to learn what was actually being done in elementary classrooms to teach comprehension. The questions I addressed in the study included: How often is comprehension instruction offered? What is its focus? Is comprehension instruction provided not only during the time set aside to teach reading but also when attention goes to content subjects like social studies and science? Findings from observations in 39 classrooms (Grades 3-6), which are reported elsewhere (Durkin, 1978-79), reinforced the conclusions I had reached during many previous visits to classrooms: Comprehension is often assessed but rarely taught.

Teachers I observed for the research--like many others--used basal reader materials. This prompted me to undertake a second study in which manuals in five basal series were examined page-by-page in order to see what they did with comprehension. These series had copyright dates of 1978 ($N=2$) and 1979 ($N=3$). Like the findings in the classroom observation research, those from the analysis of manuals showed almost nothing that could be called suggestions for teaching comprehension (Durkin, 1981).

Meanwhile, reading comprehension research was being conducted by other individuals in a variety of disciplines. So much research was done, in fact, that new journals came into existence to report it (Guthrie, 1980). Subsequently, some researchers began to examine basal programs, often focusing on their efforts to teach comprehension. A sample of these studies is reviewed next.

Hare and Milligan (1984) analyzed four series, Grades 1-6, with copyright dates ranging from 1978 to 1983. The specific aim of the study was to learn what the series did with "main idea." Writing about the results of their analysis, the researchers showed concern for (a) the confusion in manuals between "main idea" and "topic"; (b) the undifferentiated definition of main idea that was used whether text was narrative or expository, long or short; and (c) the pervasive tendency of manual authors to direct children to identify a main idea (even when none was in the text) rather than to explain how to go about identifying it.

Like my own investigation of basal programs, that of Hare and Milligan found that practice exercises commonly had multiple-choice formats, which means that main ideas are selected, not generated, by children. Text for the exercises was a brief paragraph; and, typically, the main idea was communicated with a sentence in first-sentence or last-sentence position.

The following year, Shapiro (1985) reported her study of eight Grade 6 basal manuals with copyright dates of 1979 and 1980. Using an instrument constructed to evaluate manual suggestions that was based on recommendations of literature experts for dealing with poetry, Shapiro critiqued every section in the manuals that dealt with a poem. Again, manuals were found wanting. Shortcomings Shapiro found had to do with (a) the failure of manual authors to treat poetry as a "sound and sense" experience, (b) their tendency to impose interpretations of a poem rather than to encourage more personal reactions, (c) the use of comprehension assessment questions that required little more than one-word answers, and (d) follow-up activities that lacked imagination--for instance, "Write a poem about rain" or "Write a poem using alliteration." To cite a more specific case, for a poem that deals with the sounds and rhythms of the names of fish, the suggested postreading assignment was to have students find the etymology of each fish's name.

In 1987, Reutzel and Daines reported a study that dealt with the "relatedness" of manual suggestions. Consequently, the researchers examined manuals in order to see whether the instructional recommendations they made related to the selections students were reading. A total of 210 "instructional units" were analyzed. (A unit consists of one selection in the pupil textbook and corresponding manual recommendations for new vocabulary, phonics, word structure, comprehension, and study skills.) The instructional units were randomly selected from Grade 1-6 manuals in seven series. Copyright dates ranged from 1982 to 1985.

Reutzel and Daines divided manual recommendations for comprehension into assessment questions and instruction. Although the researchers did not identify topics covered for comprehension instruction, they did state that the topics related to the selections in the pupil textbooks only 39% of the time. Most of the assessment questions are described as "low level," because the researchers judged them to deal with unimportant details.

Still more accounts of basal materials are in the references at the end of this report (Hawkes & Schell, 1987; Meyer, Greer, & Crummey, 1987; Prince & Mancus, 1987; Reutzel & Cooter, 1988; Winograd & Brennan, 1983). Like those already referred to, these investigators do not have much that is positive to say about the series they examined. The 1980s, therefore, can be characterized as a time when basal bashing abounded. The following account of more recent series duplicates and also adds to the complaints.

Why Analyze Still More Basal Programs?

With all the attention that basal materials received in the 1980s, explaining why yet another analysis was conducted may be necessary.

The most compelling reason has to do with the vast amount of comprehension research that was reported in the latter part of the 1970s and during all of the 1980s. The fact that a substantial portion of this research dealt with comprehension instruction made it natural to wonder about the impact it might have on the development of new--not updated--basal series. When I learned that the statewide textbook selection committee in California planned to consider reading materials for possible adoption in late 1988, I made the decision to use basal programs submitted to California as a vehicle for seeing whether and how the comprehension research had affected basal programs. The decision was based on the assumption that the importance of getting on California's list of "approved series" would move publishers to make major efforts to do the best job possible with comprehension instruction.

At first, the new study was conceived of as answering the question, "What do basal programs do with comprehension--10 years later?" The initial decision, therefore, was that manuals from Kindergarten through Grade 6 would again be analyzed in order to identify the amount of comprehension instruction offered as well as the topics that the instruction covered. The extent to which selected topics relate to what children are reading in the pupil textbooks was of concern, too. Other purposes had to do with

the amount and nature of review activities. Because it was taken for granted that workbooks and workbook-like exercises would be in the new series, the amount and nature of this type of practice was also of interest.

Why these original questions had to be altered will be explained when the programs selected are described.

Programs Selected for the Analysis

Every few years publishers of basal programs update their series, more for the purpose of obtaining new copyright dates than for making major alterations in their instructional programs. Entirely new series, on the other hand, are less common.

To ensure that the series chosen for the analysis represented publishers' most up-to-date efforts to use findings and recommendations from comprehension instruction research, I made the decision to examine only those series submitted to California that were *new*. In addition, I decided to choose only publishers whose materials are commonly among the best sellers, as they have the best opportunity to be influential. Using these two criteria, I selected five series.

Changes in the New Series

Letters sent to publishers of the five series explained the study I planned and also requested copies of the new programs, Kindergarten through Grade 6. Parts of each series began to arrive in the summer of 1988; all had 1989 copyright dates.

Changes in Size

One immediately apparent feature of all the new programs was an increase in size. For example, two manuals (Kindergarten and Readiness) rather than one (Readiness) preceded manuals for Grade 1. Like all the other new manuals, the two seemed unusually large.[1] Table 1 documents this by noting the number of pages in all the manuals for all five series. Not communicated in Table 1 is that manual pages in two of the five series contain large amounts of text with little open space.

The fact that workbook-like exercises were hardly overlooked is supported by the information in Table 2, which lists the number of exercise sheets shown in the manuals. Still more are in supplementary workbooks and collections of blackline masters.

Instructional charts have always been available for purchase; again, however, the number in the 1989 series was uncommonly large. Table 3 lists the number of charts shown in each manual for each series.

Changes in Content

It was taken for granted that one change in the new series would be increased amounts of comprehension instruction covering more topics than has been customary. Nonetheless, the amount of *very apparent* attention that goes to comprehension was not anticipated. Even pre-Grade 1 manuals are made considerably heavier by the space allotted to topics associated with comprehension. More specifically, all of the following are dealt with at the earliest levels: cause and effect, details, drawing conclusions, main idea, nonfiction, predictions, reality and fantasy, semantic webs and maps, sequence, and story structure.

Table 1

Number of Pages in Manuals: Kindergarten--Grade 6*

Series	K**	R**	Grade 1			Grade 2		Grade 3		Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6
			Preprimers	Primer	First Reader	II[1]	II[2]	III[1]	III[2]			
A	681	146	533	435	401	633	619	641	612	919	918	983
B	579	615	600	472	526	652	662	725	692	910	902	923
C	481	146	471	369	357	439	395	512	546	794	787	778
D	477	257	698	389	406	623	612	696	651	985	933	941
E	341	219	459	331	223	395	385	398	401	680	688	705

*Excludes introductory material, scope and sequence charts, appendices, word lists, glossaries, and the like.
**K = Kindergarten, and R = Readiness.

Table 2

Number of Exercises Shown in Manuals: Kindergarten--Grade 6

Series	K	R	Grade 1			Grade 2		Grade 3		Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	All Levels Combined
			Pre-primers	Primer	First Reader	II[1]	II[2]	III[1]	III[2]				
A	325	88	446	283	249	489	467	412	338	568	568	598	4,831
B	212	213	293	174	215	227	230	223	234	251	258	261	2,791
C	216	124	296	200	218	260	260	144	144	192	192	192	2,438
D	72	130	394	190	206	246	230	254	238	431	426	410	3,227
E	238	178	326	237	260	229	203	207	202	394	399	393	3,266

Table 3

Number of Instructional Charts in Manuals: Kindergarten--Grade 6

Series	K	R	Grade 1			Grade 2		Grade 3		Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	All Levels Combined
			Pre-primers	Primer	First Reader	II[1]	II[2]	III[1]	III[2]				
A	0	0	79	102	81	158	144	124	117	198	177	198	1,378
B	0	0	70	62	58	92	103	115	104	152	136	138	1,030
C	0	0	84	91	96	100	54	68	89	136	152	175	1,045
D	0	0	108	101	118	185	144	178	143	247	187	193	1,604
E	0	0	66	59	82	47	42	81	87	134	125	133	856

In these beginning manuals, a term is sometimes used--for instance, "important detail"--but little or nothing is done with it. At other times, instruction is described. Because authors of the manuals assume that kindergartners are unable to read, the comprehension instruction they recommend centers on pictures or text that the teacher reads. Sometimes, too, role playing is used; at other times, a teacher is directed to perform certain actions. Attention to making predictions, for instance, might have a teacher pretend to bat a baseball, after which the children state what is likely to happen next. Actually, making predictions is such a popular topic in two of the series that pre-Grade 1 manuals have children make predictions about stories the *second* time they are read.

Additional Changes in Content

In the manuals examined, considerable amounts of attention go to writing. (Whenever pencils or crayons touch paper, the activity is labeled "Writing" in Kindergarten manuals.) Perhaps the generous space allotted to writing should not have been surprising, given the current interest in both writing and reading-writing connections.

As manuals were being skimmed, it was assumed that the numerous segments that are labeled "Listening" or "Speaking" reflect yet another current interest: integrating the language arts. What the majority of these manual segments demonstrate, however, is that "adding on" is hardly the same as "integrating."

At predictable points in the manuals, segments also have labels that refer to subject matter areas--for instance, to social studies, science, mathematics, economics, and health. Other segments are said to deal with art, music, careers, drama, and physical education.

Reason for Changes

Puzzled by all that was in the manuals, I obtained from the California State Department of Education information about the kinds of materials it had requested from publishers. The main requests, described in the document "English-Language Arts Framework" (1987), are summarized below.

1. A literature-based language arts program.
2. Phonics instruction that ends in Grade 2.
3. Comprehension instruction that makes strategies explicit with the help of modeling.
4. Writing activities that place emphasis on the process of writing and that vary in their purpose.
5. Suggestions for organizing a class that include cooperative learning groups.
6. Suggestions for relating content subjects to the language arts.

Even though California's requests explained the much enlarged focus of the new manuals, the materials they fostered raised a question about the ability of any textbook selection committee to make a knowledgeable decision about which series to choose.

What to Analyze?

All the reasons that would make it difficult for a school system to choose a series account for the puzzlement that was experienced when it came time to make final decisions for the study. In the end,

two topics were selected for attention: main idea and story structure. In all cases, "attention" was equated with an examination of *every page in every manual in the five series, Kindergarten through* Grade 6. Why the two topics were chosen, and what was found, are dealt with in subsequent sections of this report. Findings when beginning reading instruction and phonics were the focus have already been reported (Durkin, 1989, 1990a, 1990b).

Reasons for Examining Main Idea Instruction

The initial, somewhat cursory look at the new manuals was sufficient to indicate that whoever had responsibility for deciding what would be taught hardly forgot "main idea." Later, a more systematic scrutiny of the manuals revealed that the series deal with main ideas from the pre-Grade 1 to the Grade 6 level. I mention this, because one reason to examine main idea instruction was curiosity: What could be done with this one topic that would require such prolonged attention?

The second, more important reason had to do with the fact that main ideas figured prominently in comprehension research throughout the 1980s, probably because the ability to know what is important in expository text is so essential. As indicated earlier, some investigators looked at how instructional materials treat main ideas (e.g., Hare & Milligan, 1984; Moore & Smith, 1987; Winograd & Brennan, 1983). The process of arriving at main ideas is the topic of other reports (e.g., Afflerbach, 1987; Hare, Rabinowitz, & Schieble, 1989; Johnston & Afflerbach, 1985). Still more publications describe evaluations of procedures for teaching about main ideas (e.g., Baumann, 1984; Hare & Borchardt, 1984; Taylor & Beach, 1984). Main idea instruction is also the concern of a collection of 11 chapters distributed by the International Reading Association (IRA) under the title *Teaching Main Idea Comprehension* (Baumann, 1986).

With all the attention that had gone to main ideas, it seemed reasonable to conclude that those responsible for preparing 1989 manuals profited from recommendations made in the sizeable number of publications available. The second reason, therefore, for examining main idea instruction was to see whether, and how, the recommendations had been heeded.

Recommendations for Main Idea Instruction

The summary of recommendations that follows in no way implies that everything that needs to be known about main ideas *is* known. Stated differently, the fact that the first chapter in the IRA publication referred to above is entitled "The Confused World of Main Idea" reflects reality. Nonetheless, I believe that few if any who have worked with main ideas would find the following recommendations unacceptable. They assume that a basal series is being used.

1. Main idea instruction should make use of expository text--that is, of text whose central aim is to inform. Although stories may have major events or a central theme or teach a moral, they do not have main ideas in the same sense that expository text has main ideas.
2. Expository text used for instruction should include selections in the basal readers. This helps children understand the reason for the main idea instruction.
3. Because expository text deals with a topic, which is what the information is about, instruction about "topic" is necessary if main ideas are to be understood. Instruction should eventually attend to expository material that is long enough to cover a variety of inter-related topics. Children should be helped to learn that topics can be identified with very few words--sometimes, with as few as one.
4. Commonly, expository text also has main ideas, which are the major points that an author makes about a topic. Because main ideas are easier to identify in paragraphs than in longer passages, paragraphs should be used initially. Children eventually need to learn that paragraphs do not always have main ideas; paragraphs with different structures are useful in making this point.

5. Children also need to know that when a paragraph does have a main idea, it may be stated directly with a sentence. Although this sentence is often at the beginning or end of the paragraph, it can occur anywhere. Other sentences in a paragraph of this type commonly add details that relate to the general point that the main idea statement makes. These sentences are thus said to provide supporting details.
6. When a paragraph has a main idea, it is not always stated. This means that children should be taught how to construct an implied main idea by integrating the information that the sentences that make up the paragraph provide.
7. Extracting implied main ideas from text is difficult. Instruction, plus practice, are required to overcome the difficulty. For both instruction and practice, it is more fruitful to have children generate main ideas than to select them from a list of possibilities. This calls into question the common use of multiple-choice formats for instruction and practice.
8. The very brief passages that basal programs commonly use for attending to main ideas offer little help with longer, authentic pieces of discourse. Transfer is impeded for a variety of reasons. The brevity itself can be a problem as can the fact that the basal text used for instruction may be neither a story--even though it is often called that--nor exposition. When the text does have a main idea, it is made obvious with a main idea statement in initial position. All subsequent sentences are related to the statement in obvious ways. Because authors of naturally occurring expository prose are not nearly this considerate, work with main ideas must shift eventually to the real world--for instance, to magazine articles and content subject textbooks.

Procedures for Examining Main Idea Instruction

For the study, every page in every manual was examined in order to find sections that deal with main ideas. For each of the five series, all such sections were copied and arranged in a notebook in the order in which they appear in the series. Reading through each notebook allowed not only for seeing the progression with which a series covers main ideas but also for making distinctions between instruction and review. (Manual labels were ignored because, as was the case 10 years ago, mislabeling is not uncommon.) Arranging sections this way also highlighted the large amount of verbatim repetition in the manuals as well as contradictions in instruction.

Any section in a series that had new information about main ideas was called "instruction"; sections that repeated information provided earlier were considered to be "review." Judgments as to what constituted new information were generous, perhaps to a fault. To illustrate, if a section stated that a main idea is what the author wants readers to know about a topic and another defines main idea as the most important information in a paragraph, both sections were catalogued as "instruction." If a section included new information as well as some provided earlier in the series, that section was counted as both instruction and review.

Initially, all the sections in a series were classified "instruction" or "review" (or both) by a research assistant, after which I made a second independent judgment. On the rare occasions when judgments were different, the information in question was called "instruction" rather than "review."

Additional Comments

For the report of main idea instruction, two of the five series will be described in detail. Tables 1-3 referred to them as Series B and Series C. Based on the recommendations listed earlier for main idea instruction, Series B was judged as offering the least desirable instruction whereas Series C was thought to offer the best.

Before main idea instruction in Series B and Series C is described, two other comments need to be made. The first is that "best" is a relative term. As used here, "best instruction" merely indicates that of the five series examined, Series C's treatment of main ideas was judged to be better than that of the

other four. To be remembered, too, is that the criteria for making this judgment derive from the recommendations for main idea instruction listed earlier. Anyone, therefore, who disagrees with the recommendations may question the judgment made not only about Series C but also about Series B.

Series C: Best Main Idea Instruction

Main ideas receive initial attention in Series C in the Readiness manual. A summary of the only suggestion made at this level will explain why the section was not considered to be instruction and, further, why the section was thought to be less than a good omen for Series C:

> Printed as if a poem, a piece of text about buildings (e.g., airport and post office) is read by the teacher. As children respond to questions about each building and who works in it, the teacher is directed to make a "schematic map" on the board. The one in the manual shows "Skyline of Many Buildings" as the main idea even though that is not even implied in the text. Each type of building is listed as a topic; the name of workers in the building is said to be a detail.

Series C does not refer to main ideas again until the third Preprimer.

Kinds of Main Idea Instruction

All information that Series C provides for main idea comprehension, starting at the Preprimer level, is listed in Figure 1. The section in the third Preprimer is the only one classified "instruction." All other sections were judged to provide (a) instruction and review or (b) review only.

The following comments about Series C assume that the findings listed in Figure 1 have been read.

Comments about Main Idea Instruction in Series C: Positive

The most outstanding difference between the treatment of main ideas in Series C and in the other four programs is its consistent use of expository text for instruction, review, and practice. The use of expository selections that children have read when instruction is offered is also praiseworthy. The fact that Series C refers to expository text as "a story" on four occasions is not considered a major flaw because the other four series misuse "story" so often that the persons examining the manuals routinely had to check to see what in fact was being called "a story."

Commendable, too, are the periodic contrasts that Series C makes between expository text and text that tells a story. This helps clarify the nature of both. That Series C deals with "topic," "main idea," and "details" together--once each is explained--is another positive feature, as the three are interrelated.

Comments about Main Idea Instruction in Series C: Negative

In spite of the commendable procedures that Series C uses to teach students about main ideas, three serious flaws were identified. They have to do with insufficient instruction and unsuitable workbook exercises.

To begin, too little is done in Series C with text that exceeds a paragraph. (This is true of all five series). Although expository selections in the pupil textbooks are referred to, only parts of a selection are often featured. Even when children are taught that longer expository selections have a topic and main idea just as paragraphs within the whole of the text have topics and main ideas, the unchanging

Figure 1

Series C: Main Idea Instruction

Level	Information Provided
PP[3]	1. "Topic" is explained as "mostly what the information is about" in an expository selection the children have read. "Main idea" is "what the author wants us to know about the topic." 2. An expository selection is referred to as an "article." Good readers ask themselves, "What is this about? What does the author want me to know about this topic?" 3. "Details" are what the author tells about the main idea.
Primer	1. Authors sometimes separate information into paragraphs. Main ideas are "important ideas." Details are "a lot of information."
First Reader	1. Children are taught again that the most important idea in a paragraph is the main idea. The other sentences tell about the main idea and are called "details." A chart lists main ideas and details in a selection just read. One word is used for each main idea. Children are told that each word sums up a main idea.
II[1]	1. Groups of similar objects are displayed (e.g., clothing). Sentences starting with "These are . . ." are used to describe each group. Children are told that the sentences "state the main idea we thought of for each group." Reading a paragraph from the pupil textbook, the teacher is directed to model how she would decide which sentence gives the main idea. The teacher then shows that the other three sentences in the paragraph answer the questions, *Who? Where? What?* 2. Sometimes the main idea is not stated in the first sentence of a paragraph; at other times, the main thought is "spread out in many sentences." 3. Some paragraphs will not have a main idea. Looking for main ideas is important because it helps readers "understand the most important idea that the author wants us to remember." 4. Paragraphs that do not have a main idea sentence often give examples or details about something. One sample paragraph is used to identify its topic, after which the children are to think of a sentence that "ties together" the details told in the sentences. This is the "main idea sentence." It is added to the paragraph. 5. "Nonfiction" is used to describe text that gives information or tells a true story. Special attention goes to detail sentences, defined as those that tell about a main idea and answer *Who, What, Where, When,* and *Why* questions. A diagram shows the topic, main idea, and details in a paragraph that the children read.

Figure 1 (Continued)

Level	Information Provided
II[2]	1. Details are highlighted with question words: *Who, What, When, Where, How,* and *Why*. Children supply details for writing a paragraph that starts with a main idea statement about the usefulness of wheels. 2. Subheadings in expository text that the children have read are described as showing the topics the selection covers. Children reread the selection so that connections can be made between topic, main idea, and details.
III[1]	1. A longer piece of nonfiction has a topic and a main idea and, within the whole selection, paragraphs may have their own topic, main idea, and supporting details. All this is illustrated in a chart based on a selection just read. Attending to topics, main ideas, and details is important because it helps readers understand and remember. 2. "Topic sentence" is one that helps readers figure out the topic of a nonfiction selection.
III[2]	1. Titles of nonfiction selections sometimes, but not always, reveal the topic. This is discussed in relation to main ideas.
IV	1. Knowing about topics, main ideas, and supporting details helps in understanding how authors organize information.

nature of the 38 workbook exercises for main ideas means that subsequent practice focuses on paragraphs only. (Brief text is also used for practice in the other four series.)

Admittedly, starting at the II[1] level, Series C does direct teachers to have children find topics, main ideas, and related details in magazines, encyclopedias, nonfiction trade books, and content subject textbooks. In fact, this suggestion is made many times. The problem is that it fails to take into account that the recommended sources will have paragraphs that bear little resemblance to the contrived text that Series C consistently provides for practice. Therefore, the unsupervised use of these "real world" sources, which is what is recommended, must be questioned.

Another flaw is the paucity of attention that Series C gives to implicit main ideas and ways to construct them. (This also characterizes the other four series.) References to unstated main ideas were found but four times in Series C; only twice are suggestions made for how to state what an author implies. Unexpectedly, the workbook practice in both instances focuses on paragraphs in which main idea statements are prominent.

Also questionable is the failure of Series C to compare paragraphs that have main ideas and supporting details with other paragraphs with different structures. (The omission of contrasts characterizes the other four series, too.) Contrasts could have been made with paragraphs that concentrate on a cause-effect relationship or, for example, on a sequence that might pertain to events or processes.

Why Series C gives so little attention to important topics lacks an obvious answer. As Figure 1 showed, very little new information is offered beyond Grade 2--none at all in the Grade 5 and 6 manuals. Perhaps a better route for Series C to have followed is one that initiates attention to main ideas later than first grade; extends new instruction beyond fourth grade; and includes more attention to implicit main ideas. Because the workbook exercises are consistently weak links in the chain of manual sections that deal with main idea, they, too, need to be replaced with something better.

Series B: Poorest Main Idea Instruction

Reading the manual sections in Series B that deal with main ideas was tedious, first, because of repetition--often verbatim repetition--and, second, because lessons tend to be long and detailed. The confusion that contradictions caused required careful reading and, at times, rereading. In the end, a written record of how Series B explains "topic," "main idea," and "detail" had to be kept in order to keep track of the various definitions offered.

Figure 2 lists the information this series provides about main ideas. Contradictions, plus other deficiencies that will be discussed, explain why Series B fared so poorly when judgments were made about main idea instruction in the five series.

It is suggested that Figure 2 be examined now, as subsequent comments about Series B assume knowledge of its contents.

Flaws in Series B: Use of Narrative and Expository Text

At the core of Series B's problems with main idea instruction is its interchangeable use of narrative and expository text for instruction, review, and practice. How often narrative text figures in instruction, as opposed to expository text, is indicated next.

Figure 2

Series B: Main Idea Instruction

Level	Information Provided
K	1. Clues in pictures help in knowing what the whole picture is about. Telling what a picture is "mostly about" is "telling the main idea." 2. Stories are compared to pictures, after which the teacher reads a story. Details are "the things" that happen in stories. "Main idea" is "what the story is mostly about." 3. A title for a picture or story "tells what the picture or story is mostly about."
R	1. Knowing how to recognize the main idea helps to be better at listening, reading, and thinking. 2. Main idea is "the most important idea of the whole story, told in a few words."
PP[1]	1. Details explain, or tell more about, the main idea, which is "telling what a whole story is about."
PP[3]	1. Only the important details in a story are connected to its main idea. *Who, what, where,* and *when* details help readers understand a story's main idea. 2. The main idea "connects the important details in the story."
P	1. Many times, one sentence in a story tells the main idea.
First Reader	1. Some details are important even though they are not important for the main idea of a story. 2. A title may give "just a general idea" about the content. 3. Asking, "Would the story change a lot if this detail was not in the story?" helps in deciding whether a detail is important.
II[1]	1. The focus shifts to "the main idea of a page." Attention then returns to the main idea of the whole story. 2. Sentences may have main ideas. 3. Writers "create" paragraphs by starting with a main idea of what will be said in the paragraph. The remaining sentences add "supporting details to provide more information." 4. "Topic" is defined as "the general thing a story is about." The topic is "the general thing that is part of the story on every page." The main idea tells one thing about the topic; the details tell about the main idea. 5. "The topic of a paragraph tells you what it is about" and the most important idea in the paragraph is the main idea. Following this, "topic" is related to the whole of a selection whereas "main idea" continues to be placed in the context of a paragraph.

Figure 2 (Continued)

Level	Information Provided
II[2]	1. An expository text is referred to as an "article." Immediately afterwards, it is consistently said to be a story. 2. Children are asked to write a "story" (actually, a paragraph), starting with the sentence, "We washed the car." 3. Knowing main ideas helps one understand and remember. 4. Main idea statements can be anywhere in a paragraph. 5. The title of an expository selection gives the topic of the whole selection; subtitles or subheadings tell what will be said about the topic. 6. A distinction is made between important details and descriptive details. The former help in figuring out the main idea; the latter tell more about the important details.
III[1]	1. Important details in a paragraph tell more about the main idea. However, "one or two details tell the most about the main idea." 2. Understanding topic, main idea, and important details helps readers know how to organize information. 3. A story often has "one main point" and "several main ideas in different parts of the story." (The examples used imply that these main ideas are the major events in plots and that they are useful in retelling a story.)
III[2]	1. A distinction is made between "supporting details" (develop the main idea) and "descriptive details" (describe the setting). 2. Advice is given for constructing the main idea of a paragraph when it is not stated: First decide what the topic of the paragraph is and then decide what is the most important thing that the paragraph says about the topic. 3. Long articles have a main idea. 4. When the topic is not revealed in a title, the topic and the main idea can be figured out by reading the details.
IV	1. Main idea sentences are called "topic sentences." 2. Summaries should state only main ideas. 3. How to use topics, main ideas, and supporting details in outlines is discussed. 4. "Nonessential details" are defined as those that do not pertain to the main idea of a paragraph.
V	1. Parts of the most important idea in an article may be in separate paragraphs. The parts needed to be combined to make a main idea statement. Combining the parts helps with understanding and retention. 2. Constructing the main idea of a paragraph is considered. (Suggested questions pertain to evaluation, not construction: Does constructed statement change the meaning of the paragraph? Does it take in all the details? Can it be added to the beginning or end of the paragraph and make sense?) 3. Articles may have subtopics, which are named in subheadings. Topics and subtopics help readers find the main idea of a selection. Each subtopic has a main idea.
VI	1. "Transitional" details are contrasted with "supporting" and "descriptive" details. They are details that "make the story flow," that connect one part of a story with another part. 2. Who writes a selection affects what its main ideas are. The author's point of view is "a supporting detail."

Level	Percentage of Times Narrative Text is Used
Primer	87
First Reader	80
Grade 2	54
Grade 3	61
Grade 4	27
Grade 5	17
Grade 6	60

Whether clear, effective instruction for main idea comprehension can ever be achieved when narrative and expository texts are used interchangeably is highly unlikely because of the confusion this creates for the meaning of both "topic" and "main idea."

An additional problem in Series B is its frequent misuse of "story." Routinely, very brief passages that neither tell a story nor provide information are said to be a story. Even when an expository selection appears in the readers, it, too, is as likely as not to be referred to as a story. Problems like these made it natural to wonder whether careful preparations were made to deal with main idea instruction and, in addition, whether those writing manuals for Series B were sufficiently knowledgeable to be charged with that responsibility.

Flaws in Series B: Contradictions

Contradictions in the definitions of key terms were another reason to wonder whether a pre-established plan guided the recommendations found for main idea instruction. As Figure 2 indicated, what is a topic and what is a main idea gets blurred quickly. Other confusion arises when teachers are directed to state that just as narrative and expository texts have main ideas, so too do pages and sentences.

Telling children that writers start a paragraph with a main idea sentence, after which they are told that main idea statements are anywhere in a paragraph, is not helpful either.

Even though "detail" is easier to deal with than "main idea," problems hardly vanish when Series B covers details. Specifically, the following information is supposed to be imparted to children:

> Important details are those that are related to the main idea.
>
> Some details are important even though they are not related to the main idea.
>
> Important details tell about the main idea, but one or two details tell the most.
>
> Descriptive details tell about the important details.
>
> Descriptive details tell about the setting.
>
> The author's point of view is a supporting detail.

To be noted, too, is that the persistent reliance of Series B on *who, what, where, when, why,* and *how* questions to identify important details functions differently: They make no distinction between what is important and what is trivial.

Main Idea Instruction in the Five Series: A Brief Summary

As stated, Series C stands out as being different from the other four in how it deals with main idea instruction. It is also better. However, like the other four series, it has shortcomings that include the following:

1. Main ideas are dealt with too early--that is, before children are ready to understand this concept.

2. The little help provided for constructing statements of implied main ideas hardly reflects the difficulty of the task.

3. Text that is longer than a paragraph receives insufficient attention.

4. No supervised work is done with text like that found in magazines and content subject textbooks.

5. Attention to paragraphs with different structures for the purpose of clarifying each type is missing.

The other four programs, in addition to having all the shortcomings just listed for Series C, have still more. All, for example, give generous amounts of attention to main ideas as early as the Kindergarten level. To do this, they rely on the content of pictures. The use of pictures, however, fails to make clear and consistent distinctions between "topic" and "main idea." The possibility that what is done with pictures has no transfer value for dealing with text also raises a question about all the time spent on examining their content.

Why the four programs do so much so early with main ideas has no obvious answer especially when it is remembered that after Grade 3, little that is new is covered. In fact, it is repetition that stands out in all the later manuals, whether the section is labeled "instruction," "review," or "reteach." Often, too, the repetitive material repeats word-for-word what was said earlier. Accompanying these repetitive sections are brief exercises, which helps to account for the large number of workbook pages that deal with main ideas:

Series A	Series B	Series D	Series E
142	80	65	84

In contrast, Series C has 38 workbook pages for main ideas.

The most obvious and persistent way in which Series A, B, D, and E are alike has to do with the use of both stories and expository text when they instruct about main ideas. Their frequent reliance on text that is as brief as a paragraph--even in the upper grades--is another similarity. Whatever the content of the paragraphs, it is always possible that they will be referred to as stories in both manuals and workbooks. This leads to teaching misinformation like:

> Often, one sentence tells the main idea of a story.
>
> Every paragraph in a story or article has a main idea.

Details also suffer from confusion with this mix of narrative and expository text. Sometimes details are described as providing information about the main idea; at other times, they are equated with the events in a story's plot.

The conclusion that examining Series A, B, D, and E forced me to draw is that the publishers are their own worst enemies if they continue to mix two different kinds of text when they provide suggestions that, supposedly, help teachers instruct about main idea comprehension.

Story Structure: Questions Addressed

It was originally thought that examining main idea instruction would reveal what the five series do with expository text. The decision to examine instruction about story structure was based on the assumption that it was a way to learn how stories are treated. However, as the reported findings have shown, the assumption that main idea instruction would be confined to expository material was correct only for Series C. Therefore, when it came time to look at manual segments that deal with story structure, the analyses addressed different questions. For Series C the question was simply, "How does it instruct about the components of stories?" With the other four programs, the same question was addressed, plus one more: "Are connections made between (a) instruction about the components of stories and (b) what is said about stories when main idea instruction is provided?"

Why it was taken for granted that the new series would teach about story structure is explained next.

Story Structure Research

During the latter part of the 1970s and throughout the 1980s, researchers interested in comprehension often focused on expository text. Stories were not neglected, however. Of particular interest at first was (a) the structure of stories, (b) how children come to know about the structure, and (c) how that knowledge--even when tacit--affects their understanding and recall of stories. In the late 1970s, names like Applebee, Glenn, Mandler, Rumelhart, Stein, and Trabasso were closely associated with the development of a body of literature about these topics.

Even though the components that make up a story were described differently by different researchers, common elements emerged. As Stein (1978) concluded, "Although different in many respects, all (the analyses) lead to similar conclusions regarding the structure of a story. Despite the variation in the semantic content of stories, these analyses document the existence of stable organizational patterns regarding the types of information included in stories and the logical relations among the parts of a story" (pp. 2-3). It is the organizational patterns that are referred to as the structure or grammar of a story. The inter-related parts are (a) setting, (b) main character, (c) problem experienced by the main character, (d) attempt to solve the problem, and (e) resolution.

Educators, as it turned out, did not always keep in mind two features of the early work done with story structure. One was that the pioneer efforts focused on brief, simple stories--primarily on fables and folktales or something written for the research. That the findings had little to say about long, complex stories did not seem to matter. Also lost in the quickly growing interest in story structure was that the early investigators' claims pertained to children's gradually acquiring a schema for "story" by hearing stories, not by being instructed about their components. Nonetheless, professional journals for teachers soon recommended instruction.

At first, authors wrote about story structure in articles that included elaborate displays of the components of stories (e.g., Bruce, 1978; Guthrie, 1977; McConaughy, 1980; Whaley, 1981). At this time, too, Beck and McKeown (1981) called attention to the usefulness of story maps for formulating questions that help children organize and integrate story content. With effective examples, the two researchers demonstrated the superiority of questions based on story maps over questions that reflected more traditional taxonomies of comprehension. It is relevant to note that the poorest questions based on taxonomies that Beck and McKeown referred to were found in the page-by-page assessment questions that were--and continue to be--in basal manuals.

Meanwhile, educators began to report research that examined the consequences of direct instruction about the components of stories on children's ability to comprehend them. Some failed to gather evidence to support story grammar instruction (e.g., Dreher & Singer, 1980; Sebesta, Calder, & Cleland, 1982); others reported increases in comprehension ability (e.g., Short & Ryan, 1984; Spiegel & Fitzgerald, 1986). Whether findings were positive or negative, the research had shortcomings that included small numbers of subjects, short-term instruction, and the use of very brief stories written for the research. The absence of efforts to evaluate the effects of story grammar instruction over time was yet another flaw.

In spite of the mixed findings and flawed studies, interest in teaching the components of stories persisted throughout the 1980s. This was why it was assumed that the five basal programs would recommend story grammar instruction. To learn what each did do with this topic, the procedures followed for finding and describing main idea instruction were used again.

The report of findings starts with Series C because, as was explained, this program--unlike the other four--excludes narrative text from its recommendations for main idea instruction. This required asking only one question about Series C, namely, "How does it instruct about the components of stories?"

Series C: Story Structure

Series C instructs about story structure under two headings: "Elements of Fiction" and "Problem/Solution." All the instruction offered is in nine sections in the Kindergarten through Grade 6 manuals. (Review occurs 59 times.) Even though instruction segments were few in number, those responsible for the program must have thought that attending to story structure is desirable. This is suggested by the fact that the Scope and Sequence Chart indicates that character, plot, and setting receive attention in the Kindergarten and Readiness manuals; in fact, however, nothing is done with any of the terms in the Readiness manual. At the earlier Kindergarten level, "character" is used but not explained.

By the end of the third Preprimer, character, setting, and plot have all been taught. Even though teachers are reminded not to expect children to use the three terms, they soon appear in questions teachers are directed to ask. Twenty manual pages after the reminder, for example, one question is, "How did the characters' actions affect the plot?"

New information next appears in Series C in the First Reader manual. "Goal" is what the main character wants to do. This focus also allows for attention to a topic covered repeatedly in all five series: character traits.

Later, in the II[1] manual, the main character's goal is linked to solving a problem. Children are now told that understanding the main character's problem, what is done to solve it, and what the solution is, offer a "very good idea of what the story is all about."

Until Grade 5, only review occurs. Specifically, 32 sections in the II[2] - IV manuals review content taught in Grades 1 and 2. In Grade 5, the last new topic that Series C covers is "theme," which is "an important message that the author wants to give a reader." Unexpectedly, it is not until 731 pages later in the same manual that theme is referred to again even though all the other components are reviewed seven times. The one reference is in a question asked about a story. In the Grade 6 manual, 11 review sections were found, one of which compares story parts to the parts of a bicycle. (At the Grade 5 level, ingredients for pizza provide a comparison.)

Examining how Series C covers story structure allowed for identifying two encompassing patterns that are noteworthy. The first is the commendable practice of providing intermittent comparisons of the

nature of informational text and the nature of stories. Only once is the contrast flawed. In the Primer manual, teachers are told to ask children about the kind of information they learn from stories.

The other pattern apparent throughout Series C is the use of stories that children have read when instruction or review about structure is offered. On the surface, this is desirable. In practice, however, it turns out to be a mixed blessing. Specifically, when the page-by-page questions about a story are added to those used later to deal with its structure, the total is excessive. Some questions are even asked twice.

The Other Four Series

As explained earlier, one of the two questions that were addressed when Series A, B, D, and E were examined is whether connections are made between (a) the treatment of stories when manual sections teach or review main ideas, and (b) the treatment of stories when the nature of their structure is taught or reviewed. The answer for all four is identical: What is done with stories when main ideas are considered never once enters into what is done with stories when their structure is taught or reviewed. How Series A, B, D, and E teach about story structure is reported next.

Series B: Story Structure

Series B gets off to an early start with story structure. In the Kindergarten manual, pictures are used twice to discuss where stories take place. Pictures are also used twice at the Readiness level to teach "character." Then, in one lesson, the first Preprimer manual reviews "character"; teaches the term "setting"; and deals for the first time with the fact that stories take place at a certain time, deal with a problem, and have a plot, which tells the solution for the problem.

Following all this, nothing new is taught until the II^2 level. Meanwhile, review sections appear 30 times. When a selection in the reader is used for review, only one or two components are considered because the text is not always a story even though the manual refers to it as one. At these early levels, review sections also use brief contrived "stories" printed in the manuals. Sometimes, in fact, a "story" is as brief as a sentence. *The girls sat around the pool*, for example, is used to review setting.

New information next appears in Series B in the II^2 manual in a section mistakenly labeled "review." The instruction *is* brief but does explain with an example that *when* a story takes place can affect *what* takes place. The II^2 manual in Series B includes 10 more review sections, six of which cover all the story elements taught earlier. The first of the six does this when the nature of folktales is explained. The remaining review segments concentrate on characters only.

At the III^1 level, nothing new is taught. Ten review segments use brief, contrived text; the six workbook exercises focus on even shorter passages.

In contrast to the lean treatment of story structure at the III^1 level, the III^2 manual introduces the nature of fantasy, realistic fiction, and historical fiction, all explained with references to story elements. New information about stories in general is also provided: attempts to solve a problem often lead to conflict. Subsequently, conflict is referred to in five of the 13 review segments. The 12 workbook exercises continue to focus on brief passages mistakingly said to be stories.

The Grade 4 manual in Series B does little with story structure, which is reflected in the fact that only one workbook page deals with the topic. However, one piece of new information *was* found in this manual: Mood is "the special feeling authors sometimes create." Even though eight review sections about story elements are in this manual, none refers to mood. Nor do any of the 13 review segments in the Grade 5 manual, in which instruction for three topics is provided: minor characters, climax, and theme.

One more observation about the Grade 5 manual needs to be made not only because it applies to previous manuals in Series B but also because it is relevant for forthcoming comments about the Grade 6 manual. It has to do with the lack of coordination that is so apparent whether one manual or successive manuals in a series are examined. Here, poor coordination will be illustrated with what the Grade 5 manual in Series B directs teachers to ask: "What do you think are the three main elements of a story?" Afterwards, the manual states, "Some students may know they are character, setting, and plot." Given the fact that, first, the three "main elements" have already been reviewed twice in this manual and that, second, they were reviewed 69 times in previous manuals, it seems necessary to ask whether anyone involved in the production of basal programs really knows what they contain. Admittedly, the size of each manual requires numerous authors. Nonetheless, everything that has been learned about basal programs during the past ten years suggests the need for a coordination among planners and authors that is still absent.

It is highly unlikely, for instance, that whoever wrote about story structure in the Grade 6 manual of Series B had anything to do with how the topic was handled previously. This is suggested by the fact that the lively, sophisticated sections in this manual are a sharp contrast to the pedestrian, repetitive sections found earlier.

The change is noticeable the very first time that story structure is discussed. As is done in the Grade 6 manual in Series C, story elements are compared to the parts of a bicycle. Afterward, the "main elements" are reviewed with a color and specificity not seen before. Later, "plot" is expanded with the help of another display that depicts five parts: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and conclusion or resolution. "Conflict" is also specified as a struggle between people and the world, or between people and people, or within an individual. Still later, subtle distinctions are made between "tone," used for the first time in the series, and "mood." Not overlooked are specific discussions of how characters, events, and settings interact.

Meanwhile, a new genre, science fiction, is introduced with the sophistication now expected. All the while, too, selections that students are reading figure in instruction and review. The six workbook pages dealing with story structure also make use of selections in the reader. However, like everything else done with story structure at this level, the nature of the workbook tasks requires asking, "Will students be ready to deal with all this, given the fact that story structure instruction and review in the previous manuals in this series hardly add up to adequate preparation?

What cannot be overlooked, either, is that all the while the Grade 6 manual is offering an advanced literature course in story structure segments, its treatment of stories under the heading "main idea" is very parochial. As a result, what Series B does with stories conjures up a picture that shows two roads that never intersect or even come close to making brief contacts with each other.

Series A, D, and E: Story Structure

The picture just used to portray Series B also describes Series A, D, and E: No connections are made between the treatment of stories when main ideas are the topic and the treatment of stories when their structure is considered. In fact, if the sophisticated instruction about story components that occurs in the Grade 6 manual in Series B is laid aside, another conclusion is that all four series are more similar than different in how they teach story structure. The brief summaries that follow verify this even though their objective is to point out anything about a series that is distinctive.

Series A

Unlike the other programs, Series A makes generous use of story maps. In fact, throughout the Kindergarten manual, "Story Mapping" is the heading under which assessment questions are listed for the texts that teachers read to children. The label, however, is questionable for two reasons. First, the

text is not always a story and, second, the questions listed reflect traditional taxonomies rather than story components. That is, the questions are catalogued in the manual as dealing with "inference," "sequence," "drawing conclusions," and so forth.

By the time the Readiness level is reached, the heading "Story Mapping" is dropped from Series A. In fact, neither the Readiness nor the Preprimer manuals deal with story structure, which is desirable because everything read--including short poems and expository text--is said to be a story.

"Story elements," the label used when Series A deals with story structure, receive initial attention in the Primer manual. In a single lesson, "story map" is explained with attention to the beginning of a story (who, where, when), the middle (problem), and the end (solution). The term "character" is used although it was not explained earlier. All this is reviewed eight times in the manual and used three times in the workbook. Meanwhile, three selections in the reader are used to discuss "article" as something that gives information, after which each article is referred to as "a story."

Review sections occur 10 times in the First Reader manual. Noticeable by its absence is the word "plot." "Things that happen" is used instead. Review, always with story maps, continues in seven sections in the II[1] manual. An objective for one such section is "Recognizing the elements of plot in a story." What follows, however, makes no use of the term "plot."

Reviews of story maps and the same story elements persist at the II[2] level. Even though the term "setting" is taught (where and when a story takes place) and, in fact, is featured in a two-page spread in the reader, it never appears in review sections in the manual.

Like previous manuals, the one at the III[1] level begins its treatment of story maps and the previously taught elements as if everything were being covered for the very first time. All that is new, however, is a different format for the story map. Now, "Setting" covers characters, place, and time; "Problem" covers the problem plus "events"; and "Resolution" covers the ending. Unexpectedly, the next map displayed in the same manual returns to the Beginning-Middle-End format. More surprising still is that the third map has the Setting-Problem-Resolution format. Meanwhile, 23 exercise sheets deal with story elements. (Combined, the two manuals for Grade 2 had but three.) Meanwhile, too, "nonfiction" is reviewed twice as text that "gives information and facts." In each case, teachers are advised: "Tell students that the story they will read next is nonfiction."

The III[2] manual in Series A is mostly a nonevent for story structure. Previously taught elements are reviewed six times; setting is reviewed twice. Three workbook pages also deal with story elements.

For no reason that is apparent, "setting" is again featured in a lesson at the Grade 4 level. (Setting was dealt with in the II[2] pupil textbook and was the sole focus for nine workbook pages at the III[1] level and for two at the III[2] level.) One section in the Grade 4 manual, like a section in the II[1] manual, also starts with the objective "Recognizing the elements of plot in a story." Now, however, the text that follows does deal with "plot," defined as having three elements: problem, turning point, and solution. The same information is repeated in the reader. Because no story maps are subsequently displayed in the manual, it was impossible to know how the new elements are to be accommodated in the headings used earlier in story maps.

The first story map in the Grade 5 manual ignores the definition of plot just referred to and, instead, uses "Problem" to refer both to the problem and to the events that make up a plot. Later, attention focuses on "Linking Problems to Solutions," which is in fact "plot" although this term is not used. Each of the other four maps in the Grade 5 manual shows different headings, which hardly contributes to a clarification of "story elements."

"Plot," again defined as the combination of problem, turning point, and solution, is reviewed three times in the Grade 6 manual. The two story maps shown, however, do not reflect the definition. The fourth

time "plot" is reviewed at this level, the definition is changed to include who the story is about, what happens, where and when it happens, and the result. The final time "plot" is reviewed, it is said to be the sequence of events in a story. In the meantime, "setting" is again featured, unexpectedly under the objective "Recognizing the elements of plot in a story." Setting is also featured--as it was at the Grade 2 level--in the Grade 6 reader.

Series D

Like Series B, Series D gets off to an early start with story structure by using pictures and text that the teacher reads. "Characters" and "main characters" are discussed at the Kindergarten level, as is the fact that a story tells what the main characters do, what problems they have, and how they solve them. "Setting," a very popular topic in basal series, is introduced, too. Initially, setting is equated only with locale. However, midway through the Kindergarten manual, teachers are told that "setting" has to do with both where and when the events of a story occur. Why "setting" is expanded in this way is unclear, as all subsequent references to setting in the Kindergarten manual deal with "where" only.

As is true of Series A, attention to story structure is omitted at the Readiness level in Series D. The 30 sections in the Preprimer and Primer manuals categorized as "review" by the examiners deal with "character" or "setting." The latter continues to be used only to refer to where a story takes place.

"Plot" is defined in the First Reader manual as the problem and the way it is solved. Eleven pages later, another section--also labeled to suggest that new information follows--repeats the definition. Plot is then reviewed six times. Following that, character only is reviewed seven times.

The II^1 manual in Series D has eight sections that the examiners called "review." Five focus on setting. The next two deal with plot; the last one, with characters. Although what may be a computer-controlled definition for setting appears all the time ("Remind pupils that the setting of a story is where and when the events take place."), II^1 is the first level when the enlarged definition is used. Specifically, of the five times setting is reviewed, both *where* and *when* are considered three times.

The only new information in the II^2 manual of Series D is that characters often have to try more than one way to solve their problem. This is repeated three times on later pages. Eight other reviews deal with characters, twice in unusually brief segments. Two additional reviews pertain to setting.

The first topic covered under "Story Structure" in the III^1 manual is setting: where and when a story takes place. Even though the symbol I that accompanies the section stands for "Introduced in this lesson," setting was actually introduced as far back as Kindergarten. And subsequently, as has been pointed out, it is reviewed repeatedly. Now, in the III^1 manual, setting is reviewed seven times. "Character" is reviewed once, as is "plot."

The only new information in the III^1 manual is that a story may be told from a character's point of view and when it is, the story is "written in first person." The fact that *I, my,* and *we* signal a first-person perspective is stated in the same lesson. Ten pages later, first-person perspective is re-explained; this segment is also accompanied by the symbol I. Three pages later, the same topic is covered again in a segment labeled "Reteach." Five pages later, the information is repeated and is now called "Review."

The sequence just referred to is noted because it is a pattern in Series D. Specifically, information said to be new is imparted in a section labeled I. Soon, the same information is repeated, also in segments labeled I. Next follows a "Reteach" segment, which is really assessment. ("Reteach" sections are brief and end with exercise sheets.) Afterwards, the very same information is repeated in segments called "Review." Eventually, the information is restated many times throughout the series.

The pattern just outlined is useful in explaining what the III[2] manual does when it adds a new dimension to "plot," called "climax." "Climax" (or "the turning point") is said to be that part of the plot when one or more characters take action to resolve the problem. "Climax" is covered twice; both times the segments are labeled I. Subsequently, a "Reteach" segment appears, which provides assessment as well as references to "extra" exercise sheets. Afterward, "climax" is said to be reviewed seven times. "Said to be" is added because the fifth review segment was catalogued as "instruction" by the examiners. This was done because, for the first time in Series D, a diagram is presented that ties together characters, setting, problem, how a character deals with a problem, and climax--now referred to as the "high point" in the story. This particular review segment stands out because the customary practice of Series D is to deal with story components separately with the help of very brief pieces of text--often a paragraph--designed to highlight whatever component is being discussed.

The first manual segment to deal with story structure at the Grade 4 level focuses on characters. Although previous manuals analyzed and reanalyzed story characters from every possible perspective, the segment is accompanied by the symbol I, as is the next story structure segment which also deals with characters. The tendency of Series D authors to persist with a topic is illustrated by the fact that, of the first seven sections that deal with a review of story components, character traits is the topic of six.

New topics in Grade 4 are theme and third-person perspective. The examples of theme equate it with the lesson or moral taught. Coincidentally, the fourth time "theme" is reviewed, the segment is on a page where folklore is also reviewed under the heading "Forms of Literature." The result is a page made up of (a) one column of text that cites "teaches a lesson" as a characteristic of folklore, and (b) a second column of text labeled "Story Structure" that states "It is never good to be greedy" is a theme. This juxtaposition of two segments that have the same focus but are kept apart graphically illustrates the absence of coordination in basal manuals. But the lack of coordination is more encompassing than this. Even while Series D, for example, teaches and reteaches in main idea segments that "main idea" is what a story is about, it is also teaching and reteaching in story structure segments that "plot" is what a story is about.

Like the Grade 4 manual, the one for Grade 5 introduces two new topics, namely, mood and conflict. Mood, "the feeling a story gives the reader," is reviewed twice before "conflict" is taught. Although Series D uses "conflict" as a synonym for "problem," segments dealing with conflict specify types of problems--for instance, character versus character and character versus the environment. Once introduced, "conflict" is the topic in seven of the seventeen review segments that subsequently deal with story structure. Mood is reviewed five times, theme twice, setting twice, and third-person perspective once.

The Grade 6 manual in Series D is mainly a nonevent for story structure--at least on the surface. Eight sections said to be review were found, all short. However, one of the two that reviews conflict does show--albeit briefly--how conflict and climax may be connected. This is unusual for Series D, which typically deals with components one at a time. Two other reviews cover setting; in one, setting is connected with mood and conflict, which explains why this, too, was called "instruction." "Characters" is reviewed two more times in ways that repeat what has been stated many times before. One other review segment pertains to mood; the eighth, to differences between first-person and third-person perspectives.

Series E

With one exception, Series E covers story structure under three headings: Story Elements, Distinguishing Genres, and Strategy Builder. The exception is in the First Reader manual where, with eleven lines of text, a section called "Discussing Prior Knowledge" states that stories have titles, main characters, problems, and solutions.

Whenever Series E considers story structure in manual sections called "Story Elements," components are commonly dealt with singly rather than in relation to one or more other components. Each is then reviewed many times in segments that are often no more than 5-10 lines long and that inevitably conclude with a suggestion to assign an exercise sheet. This accounts for the large number of exercises for story structure shown in Series E manuals. The total number for the series, compared to the total number in the other four programs (K-VI), is shown below.

Series A	Series B	Series C	Series D	Series E
93	47	61	97	155

Unlike the treatment of story structure in sections labeled "Story Elements," sections called "Strategy Builder" explain various genres (e.g., fable, realistic fiction, fantasy) with references to all the components. These manual sections are complemented with instruction segments in the reader. The same procedure is followed when a genre is reviewed. In fact, review segments are written in ways that suggest the genre is being taught for the first time.

On the whole, the "Strategy Builder" sections are commendable. Still, they illustrate the problems of poor coordination and insufficient checking that have been referred to before. Specifically, even though myths are never featured in a "Strategy Builder" segment, they are nonetheless "reviewed." Different but still flawed procedures were found for legends. Legends *are* featured at the Grade 6 level; in this case, however, they are reviewed before they are "taught."

Manual segments in Series E that are labeled "Distinguishing Genres" provide little information that was not imparted earlier. Worthy of comment, however, is one such section in the III[1] manual that compares the nature of fiction and nonfiction. (Four segments at the III[1] level and one at the III[2] level review the contrast.) The comparison is noteworthy because, like Series A, B, and D, this program routinely uses "story" to refer to very brief text that bears no resemblance to a story. Even when the nature of expository text is featured in a lesson in Series E, it is always possible that whoever wrote the lesson will call the text a story. But such errors are in the other programs, too. The fact that Series E is not the worst offender in this regard is attested to by the numbers cited below. They indicate the number of times in the five series that the nature of expository text is the focus of a lesson, yet the text that students read is referred to as "a story."

Series A	Series B	Series C	Series D	Series E
34	37	2	15	14

Because Series E manuals deal with story structure under three separate headings, Figure 3 is used to show what is covered in all three. A few explanatory notes about Figure 3 follow.

1. Underlined topics indicate new information.

2. Numbers preceding topics show the sequence with which instruction and review are provided. To illustrate, the first topic taught at the II[1] level is "setting." It is reviewed three times before the meaning of "characters" is explained for the first time. Next comes information about the nature of fables. Once taught, "fable" is reviewed one time. Subsequently, characters in stories are reviewed three times.

3. At the Grade 6 level, the number "11" is used twice. Such use reflects the fact that a segment that the manual describes as a review of setting, plot, characters, and mood unexpectedly introduces and explains "subplot." Because all this is in the same manual segment, both the new information about subplot and the review of the other components are assigned the same number.

The above comments should be helpful while reviewing the content of Figure 3.

Story Structure Instruction: Brief Summary

As reported, Series C's consistent use of expository text for main idea instruction put it in a class apart from the other four programs. The use of appropriate text was also the primary reason for concluding that its main idea instruction was the best.

For story structure, no comparable evaluation criterion exists. Even an obvious question like what constitutes "too much" or "too little" instruction about story components has no factual, objective answer. All that can be done, therefore, is to point out what are thought to be either praiseworthy or flawed procedures in how the five series deal with story structure.

Series A is the only one that relies on story maps to teach about structure. Even though story maps seem like a desirable way to display and connect the elements of stories, how they are used in this program serves to confuse, not clarify. Because story maps do figure so prominently in Series A's treatment of structure, the program can hardly be described as providing desirable instruction.

The most outstanding feature of Series B's treatment of story structure is the abrupt change that occurs at the Grade 6 level. The change, although refreshing for the examiners, magnified the ordinary, repetitive ways in which the topic is dealt with earlier. The overall coverage of story structure in Series B is also uneven in quantity. At some levels, the topic is covered incessantly; at others, barely at all.

Like its main idea instruction, the attention that Series C gives to story grammar consistently uses selections children have read to illustrate what is being taught. As noted earlier, this desirable practice has an undesirable consequence whenever instruction about story structure is offered: The questions about the selection that are used for the instruction, combined with the inevitable page-by-page questions listed for use when the selection is being read, add up to an excessive number. This problem is one among many that result when pre-established formats for manuals are never altered.

On the positive side, Series C's practice of comparing from time to time differences between stories and expository text is commendable. That it misuses "story" only twice when instructing about expository material is one of a number of reasons for thinking that both the plans and the execution of plans for this program may have received more careful attention than was the case for the other four series.

Series D has no characteristics that make it somewhat distinctive except for the fact that, more often than the other four series, it treats story components singly rather than in relation to each other. Reconsidering Series D simply brings to mind what all five programs do. For instance:

- It introduces story components prematurely.
- The attention it gives to the components is spread out unevenly over the various grade levels.
- Its frequent review segments often head toward exercises--to 97, in this case.
- Much verbatim repetition occurs when story components are covered.

Series E, as shown in Figure 3, is distinctive in its use of three different headings to deal with story structure. The fact that it provides as many as 155 exercise sheets for this topic is something of a distinction, too. Like Series D, it shares with the other programs the questionable practices just listed.

Figure 3

Series E: Story Structure Instruction

Grade	Story Elements	Distinguishing Genres	Strategy Builder
II[1]	1. Setting (time and place) 2. Setting Review: *N* = 3 3. Characters 6. Characters Review: *N* = 3 7. Plot (important events) 8. Plot Review: *N* = 4 9. Characters Review: *N* = 1		4. Fables (characters, solve problem, learn lesson) 5. Fables Review: *N* = 1
II[2]	1. Plot Review: *N* = 1 2. Summarizing Story (who, what, and ending) 3. Summarizing Story Review: *N* = 1		
III[1]	4. Goal (what most important character wants) 6. Goal Review: *N* = 2 9. Goal Review: *N* = 1	2. Fiction (characters, setting, plot, outcome) versus Nonfiction (topic, main ideas, features [pictures, maps], headings) 3. Fiction versus Nonfiction Review: *N* = 3 7. Fiction versus Nonfiction Review: *N* = 1	1. Realistic Fiction (characters, setting, problem, solution) 5. Fantasy (characters, setting, plot, outcome) 8. Folktales (characters, setting, plot, outcome)

Figure 3 (Continued)

Grade	Story Elements	Distinguishing Genres	Strategy Builder
III[2]	1. Characters Review: $N = 1$ 3. Setting Review: $N = 1$ 4. Plot Review: $N = 1$ 5. Setting Review: $N = 1$ 6. Plot Review: $N = 1$ 7. Setting Review: $N = 1$ 8. Plot Review: $N = 1$ 9. Setting Review: $N = 1$ 10. Summarizing Stories (title, main characters, what characters did, how story ends, no details) 11. Summarizing Stories Review: $N = 1$ 12. Setting Review: $N = 1$ 13. Plot Review: $N = 1$ 14. Summarizing Stories Review: $N = 1$ 15. Setting Review: $N = 1$ 16. Plot Review: $N = 1$ 17. Summarizing Review: $N = 1$ 18. Plot Review: $N = 1$ 20. Setting Review: $N = 1$ 21. Plot Review: $N = 1$	2. Fiction versus Nonfiction Review: $N = 1$ 17. Realistic Fiction versus Fantasy Review: $N = 1$	5. Mysteries (characters, setting, plot, outcome) 19. Plays (characters, setting, plot, outcome)

Figure 3 (Continued)

Grade	Story Elements	Distinguishing Genres	Strategy Builder
IV	1. Characters Review: *N* = 1 3. Characters Review: *N* = 2 6. Mood (Setting influences mood, which is illustrated but not defined) 7. Summarizing Story Review: *N* = 1 8. Setting/Mood Review: *N* = 3 9. Plot Review: *N* = 1 10. Theme (underlying message or point author makes) 12. Theme Review: *N* = 1 13. Plot Review: *N* = 2 14. Theme Review: *N* = 1 15. Plot Review: *N* = 1 16. Setting/Mood Review: *N* = 1 18: Setting/Mood Review: *N* = 1 19. Plot Review: *N* = 1	5. Realistic Fiction/Myths/Tall Tales Review: *N* = 1	2. Realistic Fiction Review: *N* = 2 4. Tall Tales (characters, setting, plot, outcome) 11. Science Fiction (characters, setting, plot, outcome) 17. Plays Review: *N* = 1

Figure 3 (Continued)

Grade	Story Elements	Distinguishing Genres	Strategy Builder
V	1. Plot Review: *N* = 1 3. Summarizing Stories Review: *N* = 1 4. Characters/Plot Review: *N* = 1 6. Characters/Plot Review: *N* = 2 7. Setting/Mood Review: *N* = 4 8. Characters/Plot/Theme Review: *N* = 2 10. Characters/Plot Review: *N* = 1 11. Setting/Mood Review: *N* = 1 13. Characters/Theme Review: *N* = 1 14. Summarizing Stories Review: *N* = 1 15. Characters/Theme Review: *N* = 1 17. Characters/Theme Review: *N* = 1 18. Summarizing Stories Review: *N* = 1 19. Characters/Theme Review: *N* = 1	12. Realistic Fiction/Historical Fiction/Fables Review: *N* = 3 16. Summarizing Stories versus Summarizing Articles	2. Realistic Fiction Review: *N* = 1 5. Historical Fiction (characters, setting, plot, outcome) 9. Fables/Folktales Review: *N* = 1

Figure 3 (Continued)

Grade	Story Elements	Distinguishing Genres	Strategy Builder
VI	1. Setting/Characters/Theme Review: *N* = 1 3. Setting/Characters/Theme Review: *N* = 3 4. Characters Review: *N* = 1 5. Setting/Characters/Theme Review: *N* = 1 6. Summarizing Stories Review: *N* = 3 8. Setting/Characters/Theme Review: *N* = 1 11. Setting/Plot/Characters/Mood Review: *N* = 1 11. Subplot 12. Characters/Plot/Goal/Subplot/Setting/Mood Review: *N* = 1 13. Characters/Setting Review: *N* = 1 14. Mood/Plot/Setting/Characters Review: *N* = 1	9. Realistic Fiction/Myth/Legend/Folktales Review: *N* = 2 15. Myth/Legend/Folktales/Realistic Fiction Review: *N* = 1	2. Realistic Fiction Review: *N* = 1 7. Mysteries Review: *N* = 1 10. Legends (characters, setting, plot, outcome)

Conclusions

Because summaries for both main idea instruction and story grammar instruction have been presented, the conclusions discussed here are brief.

The first conclusion meriting attention is that the five series examined did not turn out to be as different from their predecessors as they appeared to be at first. Admittedly, they *look* new. Obvious as well as costly efforts were made not only to make them look up-to-date but also to add new content that reflects current interests. That the interests of the California State Department of Education were accommodated is clear. The problem, however, is that the new content was added to, not integrated with, other content. In the end, then, all the series are similar to older programs except that they cover many more topics. One exception is Series C, which stood out as being better for reasons that include "does less."

Like the other four series, however, Series C is marred by what continues to be a pervasive problem for all basal programs: the use of pre-established formats to write manuals. As long ago as 1978, one author (Pseudonymous) employed by a company specializing in the preparation of materials like manuals also referred to this serious drawback:

> To my mind, the single, gravest problem . . . , a weakness that leads to most of the other problems, is the matter of format . . . . Time is money, and formats help publishers make and maintain time tables . . . . The trouble is, very little learning material logically . . . divides into rigid, repeatable forms. But the publishers hold firm, so authors are compelled to twist and bend . . . the material to make it fit the arbitrary, predetermined form. (pp. 44-45)

There is no doubt but that "rigid, repeatable forms" contribute substantially to the monotony of the new manuals. They also account for the impression anyone will experience who is familiar with earlier basal programs, namely, "I've seen this before!" What these individuals will see again, for example, is that the selections students read are still overanalyzed with page-by-page questions; still more are listed in the reader at the end of each selection. All this suggests that anyone who approaches new versions of basal programs expecting them to reflect some literary response theory such as that of Rosenblatt (1978) will be disappointed.

They will also see--as Table 2 documents--reference after reference to exercise sheets. Not too subtle to see, either, is the verbatim repetition in all the manuals whenever a topic is reviewed and re-reviewed. The opportunity that examiners of the 1989 programs had to learn with precision how main idea and story structure are taught brought the repetition into sharp focus, leading to the conclusion that computers have their own special shortcomings.

Given the fact that manuals are written to provide suggestions for instruction, the greatest shortcoming in the new "guides" is the quality of the recommendations made. As the manual segments dealing with main idea and story structure show repeatedly, the instruction suggested is marked not only by premature appearances but also by errors, contradictions, excessive coverage, and omissions. Equally apparent is the failure of manual authors to coordinate what each does, both within a manual and between the successive manuals in a series.

In the end, the only conclusion that can be reached is the great need for publishers to abandon pre-established formats so that the selections students read determine what constitutes (a) appropriate responses, (b) necessary instruction, and (c) suitable kinds and amounts of practice. Publishers' schedules that, at the very least, permit careful checking of manuals before they are made available in the marketplace are needed, too. Without these changes, school systems that continue to purchase basal series will continue to invest in flawed materials.

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Footnote

[1]Starting in Grade 1, the new programs kept the customary distribution of textbooks. Three Preprimers, one Primer, and one First Reader are considered Grade 1 materials. Two readers are for Grade 2 (II^1 and II^2) and two are for Grade 3 (III^1 and III^2). Subsequently, each grade has one textbook.